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New York, 27 March-12 April 1995

LETTER DATED 30 MARCH 1995 FROM THE HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION ADDRESSED TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CONFERENCE

I have the honour to transmit to you annexed hereto a paper prepared by the delegation of the Russian Federation entitled "Growing threat of the destruction of Alaska pollack stocks in the Sea of Okhotsk as a consequence of large-scale unregulated and unscientific fishing in its enclave".

I should be grateful if you would have this document circulated as a document of the Conference.

(Signed) V. K. ZILANOV
Head of the delegation of
the Russian Federation

95-09164 (E) 310395 310395 030495

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Annex

GROWING THREAT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF ALASKA POLLACK STOCKS IN THE SEA OF OKHOTSK AS A CONSEQUENCE OF LARGE-SCALE UNREGULATED AND UNSCIENTIFIC FISHING IN ITS ENCLAVE

(Submitted by the delegation of the Russian Federation)

1. The Russian delegation has on several occasions (A/CONF.164/L.21, A/CONF.164/L.33, A/CONF.164/L.43) drawn the attention of the participants in this Conference to the large-scale unregulated and unscientific fishing of Alaska pollack stocks which is developing in the enclave of the Sea of Okhotsk and the need to take account of situations corresponding to the specific conditions of that Sea (a semi-enclosed sea with a small enclave of open sea surrounded by the exclusive economic zone of a single State, with a developed and proven system for the conservation of stocks in the Sea as a whole and controls to monitor compliance which have long been in effect) in the document being prepared by the Conference, and it has called upon States which are engaging in this destructive and aggressive fishing to cooperate and adopt urgent measures to preserve the unique ecosystem of the Sea of Okhotsk.

Unfortunately, these appeals and the other efforts undertaken by the Russian Federation to improve cooperation with a number of countries with a view to conserving the Alaska pollack stocks in the enclave of the Sea of Okhotsk have still not resulted in a definitive solution to the problem, despite the fact that a number of States in the region have agreed to develop such cooperation.

2. Alaska pollack stocks experience significant fluctuations from year to year and from the outset, therefore, they have been regulated on the basis of the best scientific data through the establishment of the total allowable catch (TAC) and specially elaborated regulations governing fishing, so that fishing is strictly controlled. Without these measures, in periods of decline, stocks of Alaska pollack may suffer rapid damage, as occurred during the early 1970s, when, as a result of the application of uncoordinated fishing regulations by vessels of the States of the region, there was excessive fishing and, as a consequence, a considerable drop in the catch per unit effort, a reduction in the spawning area and a decline in the total catch. Then, when the 200-mile economic zone was introduced, the problem was resolved by the Russian Federation through a mandatory decrease in the annual catch from 1.1-1.3 million tons to 500,000-600,000 tons. This resulted in the restoration of the Alaska pollack stocks in the Sea of Okhotsk and established the conditions for stable fishing of these straddling stocks.

After 1988, however, there was once again a noticeable trend in the Sea of Okhotsk towards a decline in the stocks and reproduction of Alaska pollack under the influence of natural climatic factors. By 1991, the biomass of the breeders had declined from 9.0 to 5.6 million tons, which, in turn, led to a decline of 21 per cent in the catch per unit effort in the northern part of the Sea. In these circumstances, the Russian Federation once again, as before, reduced the TAC of Alaska pollack in the Sea of Okhotsk for its own fishermen to

270,000 tons. Early in 1991, however, without consultation with the Russian Federation, as the coastal State and the only State engaged in the management of the stock, large-scale unregulated and unscientific fishing commenced, above all by vessels of the Republic of Poland and the People's Republic of China, in the enclave of the Sea of Okhotsk. The vessels of these States are still continuing to engage in destructive fishing with the result that the TAC, which had ensured stable fishing over a prolonged period of time, is being exceeded 1.3-1.6 times. The unregulated catch amounted to 297,000 tons in 1991, 589,000 tons in 1992, 410,000 tons in 1993 and 455,000 tons in 1994.

3. As a result of this fishing and, in particular, the increase in the catch of young Alaska pollack in the enclave (for example, in March and April 1993, according to the data collected by Russian scientific monitors, the catch of young fish amounted to 43.3 per cent and 18.8 per cent respectively), a sharp decline was observed in the numbers of the only abundant generations born in 1988 and 1989, amounting to two to three times the natural mortality rate. The proportion of the older age-groups in the spawning stock also declined considerably.

In the view of Russian scientists, such a regime for the exploitation of Alaska pollack stocks has today already predetermined a prolonged depression in the fishery stock and a sharp decline in the catch after 1996, until there is a mandatory cessation of fishing, which will, above all, affect the coastal population of the Far Eastern coast of the Russian Federation.

4. In these conditions and while awaiting positive results from the Conference, the Russian Federation, as the single coastal State which has long been engaged in the responsible management, conservation and optimal use of the whole ecological complex of the living resources of the Sea of Okhotsk and, in particular, the stocks of Alaska pollack, and wishing to prevent the destruction of its ecosystem as a result of continuing large-scale unregulated and unscientific fishing, has appealed to the States concerned urging them to adopt immediate measures to put a stop to such fishing.

In view of the need to avert the impending environmental disaster, the Russian Federation will take all necessary measures in accordance with its national legislation to discharge its duty towards future generations in the preservation of the ecosystem of this unique region.